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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000345

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KV](#)
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: DECENTRALIZATION SEQUENCING AND TIMING
DEBATED IN QUINT

REF: PRISTINA 336

Classified By: C.D.A. Michael J. Murphy for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During the August 14 Quint meeting, the International Civilian Office (ICO) outlined its plans for establishing additional Municipal Preparation Teams (MPTs) following the August 13 announcement of the formation of the Gracanica MPT. The ICO indicated that it will proceed with interviews for MPT members for Ranilug during the week of August 17, and argued that the MPT for Mitrovica North should be established immediately after Ranilug. We urged caution on Mitrovica North, and after a spirited debate on what should follow Ranilug, it appears likely that ICO will start with an MPT for Partesh during the week of August 24. However, the Europeans argued strongly that the ICO must move forward with an MPT for Mitrovica North and accepted ICO arguments that Mitrovica North should follow Partesh: in other words, an MPT in Mitrovica North could be established the last week of August. ICO presented polling that it argued suggests that the introduction of MPTs will increase the likelihood of Serb turnout in the November 15 municipal elections. The UK echoed ICO's view, but we offered a more skeptical interpretation. Quint participants agreed to table debate on elections for two more weeks. The U.S. is the only Quint member continuing to express reluctance on the establishment of an MPT in Mitrovica North. If we want to fall on our sword over the issue, we would have to do so at the August 21 Quint, but our judgment is that we will should support an MPT in Mitrovica North in order to conserve our political capital for the larger battle over elections. END SUMMARY

U.S. Isolated on Mitrovica North MPT

12. (C) The August 14 Quint meeting, including International Civilian Representative (ICR) Pieter Feith, representatives from the U.S., UK, German, and French embassies, and the European Commission Liaison Office, debated two open questions from the previous meeting (reftel) on the sequencing and timing for introducing additional municipal preparation teams (MPTs) in the new, Ahtisaari-mandated, Serb-majority municipalities. The International Civilian Office appointed the Gracanica MPT on August 13, and ICR Feith informed the Quint that ICO and the Ministry for Local

Government Administration (MLGA) plan to proceed with introducing the next MPT in Ranilug (the third of six proposed MPTs) during the week of August 17. ICR Feith said that his intent and preference is to proceed with an MPT in Mitrovica North following the Ranilug MPT. He and the Europeans argued that Mitrovica North should not be the final MPT and that introducing it, in series with the other new municipalities, would send a signal that Mitrovica is no different than the other decentralization locations.

¶3. (C) We expressed reservations about moving forward too quickly in Mitrovica North, arguing that we would prefer to see additional successes elsewhere first. Nonetheless, there was strong support within the Quint for proceeding with an MPT in Mitrovica North, and Feith was careful to reassure us by arguing that he expected the MPT to remain "dormant" following its introduction. He acknowledged that northern Kosovo presents special challenges, but said he favors using the MPT process as a vehicle for making clear to Kosovo Serbs that the Government of Kosovo (GOK) and the international community are serious about decentralization, at the same time making clear to Belgrade that the North is not out of bounds when it comes to integrating Serbs into Kosovo institutions. However, November 15 elections in a new Mitrovica North municipality, Feith said, would be premature.

In the absence of consensus on Mitrovica North, ICR Feith offered to proceed in Partesh, which he said would be easy, in order to keep the Quint united. The Partesh MPT interviews and selection could take place the week of August 24.

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Difficult Debate Over Elections Still Looms

¶4. (C) ICO presented new poll results where 45.6% of Serb respondents supported the formation of the new majority Serb municipalities prior to November 15 elections as evidence of Serb willingness to vote in these polls. We presented a more skeptical view, noting that support for MPTs did not equate to likelihood of Kosovo Serbs' election participation. We also reiterated that successful decentralization was not a box-checking exercise, where the establishment of MPTs, alone, represents sufficient progress to call for elections. We highlighted the need to see tangible accomplishments in the new municipalities in governance and organizational structures, local capacity to deliver municipal services, and progress in establishing municipal facilities. Finally, we argued that it was incumbent on the ICO and other donors to work closely with the MPTs and mother municipalities over the next several months in order to ensure that the MPTs' potential develops into meaningful decentralization.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: We expect strong pressure during the next Quint meeting on August 21 to accept the unified European position to introduce--or, at the very least to conduct well-publicized interviews for--the MPT in Mitrovica North immediately following the formation of the Partesh MPT. We are maintaining our vocal support for decentralization with both the Quint and the GOK, and some of our European partners will use next week's meeting as a test of our commitment, a test that is likely to require us to agree to an MPT in Mitrovica North. In our judgment, this action will buy us more credibility as we argue for holding elections in November in the existing 33 municipalities only, vice 38 municipalities (existing plus the new decentralized Serb-majority municipalities). This is the more critical argument. All evidence, including ICO's new poll, suggests to us that Serbs will not participate in large numbers in the upcoming elections, and we must avoid the prospect of Albanians winning office in the new Serb-majority municipalities. What decentralization requires is the time to move beyond the mere formation of MPTs and towards substantive progress in the new municipalities that builds their credibility and legitimacy with Kosovo Serbs. END

COMMENT
MURPHY